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Illinois Department of Healthcare  
and Family Services  
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# Important Information on Paternity for Fathers

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Division of Child Support Enforcement

As a father, you play an important part in your child's life. No one can take your place - not a coach, an uncle, a teacher, not even his mother. Every child needs to know who his or her father is and that he loves them. Your child will grow up confident and secure knowing that you are proud to be his or her father.



## What is Paternity?

### PATERNITY MEANS LEGAL FATHERHOOD

Paternity is a legal relationship between a father and his child.

If you were not married to the mother of your child when the child was born, you are not considered the legal father of that child. If your partner is expecting, your name will not be added to the baby's birth certificate unless you establish paternity.

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# Why Should I Establish Paternity?

- To show your child that you care enough to acknowledge that you are his/her father
- To add your name to the child's birth certificate as the legal father
- To help ensure your right to have a relationship with your child
- To get a legal document that proves you are the child's father
- To have the right to ask for visitation and/or custody of your child
- To protect your rights as a father should something happen and the mother is unable to care for your child
- To be able to add your child to your health insurance plan
- To make sure your child will have access to family medical records that contain information that could possibly save his or her life
- To make sure that your Social Security or veteran's benefits are paid to your child in the event of your death
- To protect your right to be notified in adoption proceedings for the child

## **How can I become my child's legal father?**

Signing a Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity (VAP) at the hospital when your child is born is the easiest and fastest way to establish paternity and get your name on your baby's birth certificate.

You can also establish paternity at the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services by:

- Signing the Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity
- Agreeing to accept the results of a genetic test
- Requesting a hearing
- Filing a petition to establish paternity by obtaining a private attorney or going to court on your own.

## **I have other children, can I establish paternity for them?**

Yes, you and the children's mother can complete a paternity form for each child. Forms may be submitted for children until they reach 21 years of age.

## **I'm under 18, can I sign the form?**

Yes. Parents under age 18 can sign the form.



**I know she won't sign the Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity. Is there another way I can establish paternity?**

The Division of Child Support Enforcement can help you establish paternity even if the mother doesn't sign the Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity. Contact the Child Support Customer Service Call Center for more information on paternity establishment and other services.

## **Will my baby's mother lose her public assistance if we sign the paternity form?**

No, public assistance is based on the family's size and household income.

However, if your baby's mother is receiving assistance and identifies you as the father, the Division of Child Support Enforcement will send a notice to you telling you to attend an interview at a specific time and date. If you come in for the interview and can show you have little or no income, your child support order may be written for as little as \$0.

## **Are you going to make me pay the hospital bills for the birth if I sign the Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity (VAP)?**

No, we will not bill you for the birth costs. However, if you have health insurance, we will seek to have the baby added to your health insurance.

## **I'm the baby's father but the mother is married to someone else. Can we sign the VAP?**

If the mother was married when the mother became pregnant, the husband is considered the legal father. You, the mother and the husband will have to take other measures to have your name placed on the child's birth certificate.

Talk to hospital staff as soon as possible. They can explain the process and help you complete the necessary paperwork.

**I'm not sure I'm the father. Should I sign the Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity (VAP) anyway?**

No. If either you or the mother is unsure who the biological father is, do not sign the VAP. Talk to hospital staff or the Division of Child Support Enforcement about having a genetic test to establish paternity.

**What if I can't make it to the hospital in time? Can I sign the VAP before the baby is born?**

You cannot sign the VAP until the baby is born. If you are unable to be at the hospital before mother and baby leave, the hospital will send a form home with the mother. Both parents must provide a complete address as well as their date and place of birth. If you make a mistake, fill out a new VAP. If the VAP is not completed correctly, it can be rejected and your name may not be placed on the child's birth certificate.

## **Why do we have to provide addresses and correct Social Security numbers:**

The Voluntary Acknowledgement of Paternity (VAP) is a legal form and must meet certain legal requirements. You may use any address where you can receive mail. If the VAP includes a false name or Social Security number, it will not be legally valid. We do not check for citizenship.

### **What do I do if I need a form?**

You may get a form by calling:  
1-800-447-4278

Send the completed and witnessed VAP to:

Administrative Coordination Unit  
110 W. Lawrence Avenue  
Springfield, IL 62704-2610

If you have other questions, contact the Child Support Customer Service Call Center at 1-800-447-4278.

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